UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

PROVISIONAL

E/1996/SR.22
1 August 1996

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Substantive session of 1996

PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 22nd MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Wednesday, 3 July 1996, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. HENZE (Germany)
(Vice-President)

CONTENTS

COORDINATION OF THE POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND OTHER BODIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM RELATED TO THE FOLLOWING THEMES: (continued)

(a) COORDINATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM ACTIVITIES FOR POVERTY ERADICATION (continued)

Corrections to this record should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of this document to the Chief, Official Records Editing Section, Office of Conference and Support Services, room DC2-794, 2 United Nations Plaza.

96-80875 (E)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Henze (Germany) Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

COORDINATION OF THE POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND OTHER BODIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM RELATED TO THE FOLLOWING THEMES: (continued) (E/1996/4 and Corr.1, E/1996/18 and Add.1)

(a) COORDINATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM ACTIVITIES FOR POVERTY ERADICATION (continued) (E/1996/61)

Mr. JIN Yongjian (Under-Secretary-General for Development Support and Management Services) said that, despite remarkable changes in the areas of economic development, world trade and technology, poverty continued to afflict the peoples of the world. The first step towards developing policies, plans and strategies to alleviate poverty was to recognize that it was a complex and multi-dimensional problem which required a multisectoral approach, including the strengthening of the capacities of developing countries and countries with economies in transition to effectively implement poverty eradication programmes.

As part of its efforts to support the efforts of developing countries, the Department for Development Support and Management Services (DDSMS) provided countries in post-conflict situations with technical expertise to assist with reconstruction and rehabilitation. It fostered poverty alleviation among marginalized groups in rural areas through a variety of multisectoral programmes in integrated rural development in such areas as agriculture, infrastructural development, health, education and village-based community development activities. It had developed a distinct methodology to maximize beneficiary involvement in decision-making and in the management of those activities and its programmes considered the linkages between poverty and the environment in order to develop operational approaches that addressed immediate survival issues while taking account of the long-term environmental consequences of poverty. It also provided Governments with technical assistance to raise the socio-economic status of women, through projects designed to develop income-generating, management and technological skills.

His Department was developing an operational framework to actively participate in the implementation of the New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s and the United Nations System-Wide Special Initiative on Africa. In Tanzania, it had assisted the Government in formulating a training programme to promote awareness among economic planners of the likely social effects of structural adjustment policies. Poverty alleviation plans and strategies, however, must filter down to the local level and institutional linkages must be forged between the macro and micro levels. Indeed, development support activities could not succeed in the absence of a genuine partnership between policy formulation and local implementation.

Mrs. REBONG (Philippines) said that the establishment of the inter-agency task forces marked an important step towards strengthening coordination between the United Nations system and the Bretton Woods institutions in the fight against poverty. A similar need existed for coordination between the task forces and intergovernmental bodies and Member States in general. For example, reports on the activities and decisions of the task forces should be made available to delegations, and the Council should have an opportunity to discuss them with the Secretariat before final instructions were forwarded to United Nations representatives at the field level. Ultimately, such interaction would strengthen coordination between the United Nations and the appropriate government authorities.

Referring to paragraph 70 of the Secretary-General's report (E/1996/61) concerning the need to develop various indicators, she noted that the inter-agency task force had been mandated to identify indicators for measuring progress in the implementation of the recommendations of the recent global conferences and in the implementation of economic and social policies. It would be useful to know what methodology would be used for the development of those indicators and whether the intergovernmental process would be involved. In its social reform agenda, the Government of the Philippines had identified 33 indicators for 10 basic needs and the task forces might wish to take the Philippine experience into account as it undertook its own work.

With regard to the reference (paragraph 128 of the report) to the need for "close consultations between the Bureau of the Council and the chairpersons of the functional commissions", her delegation understood that those consultations would involve the Council's entire membership and not only its Bureau.

She welcomed the statements of some representatives of the developed countries who shared the concern of the developing countries over the decreasing level of resources for development activities. Adequate resources were essential for the effective follow-up of the global conferences and her delegation hoped that the Council would devote enough time to the consideration of that issue.

Mr. ABDELLATIF (Egypt) said that while it was generally agreed that the United Nations system should intensify its efforts in support of government-led poverty eradication programmes, it was important to remember that the requirements of individual countries varied according to their economic structure, and that the international economic environment affected the ability of States to deal with poverty and the related issues of economic growth and investment.

The Secretary-General's report (E/1996/61) should have referred to the scale of the problem and the efforts that had been made to deal with it. That would have helped to put the importance of coordinating related activities in its proper perspective. Given the diversity of methodologies applied by the various agencies in the field, consideration should also have been given to the need for harmonization of methodologies as part of the coordination effort.

With regard to the recommendations contained in paragraphs 66 to 70 of the report, more details should have been given on the impact of declining development assistance on the ability of development institutions to deal with the poverty problem. While concurring with the premise of paragraph 66, that primary responsibility for poverty eradication strategies lay with the Governments, he pointed out that paragraph 67 made no reference to what steps should be taken when development resources were in severe decline. Indeed, it made no mention at all of the impact of declining resources on poverty eradication activities. Paragraph 72 should have made it much clearer that the recipient Government had primary responsibility for the formulation of the country strategy note (CSN). Similarly, regarding paragraph 79, his delegation felt that it was up to each Government to make decisions regarding complementarity between policy framework papers (PFPs) and the CSN.

Despite those comments, the Egyptian delegation hoped that the report would contribute to eliminating duplication of effort, helping to garner the support and resources needed to achieve the vital goal of poverty eradication.

Mr. SCHORI (Sweden) said that the uneven distribution of resources caused growing poverty and suffering for the majority of the world's population, while the rich got richer. Poverty was the enemy of peace, a threat to democracy and an obstacle to development. To fight poverty was therefore to struggle for peace, democracy and development.

The methods used by the international community to fight poverty must be continuously refined through analysis of the different situations of poverty and the various external and internal factors that caused it. Broad participation in poverty eradication programmes by the men and women concerned also enhanced the effectiveness and sustainability of development initiatives and at the same time promoted democracy. There could be no sustainable poverty reduction without empowerment of the poor.

With regard to the coordination of poverty eradication efforts, there was need for a more active dialogue involving partner countries, development planners, decision makers and the populations concerned.

Finally, poverty could only be alleviated with the assistance of a strong civil society. It was therefore imperative to promote grass-roots organizations, good governance, democracy, and human rights in order to strengthen civil society.

Women, who accounted for two thirds of the people living in extreme poverty, had a particularly important role to play in the eradication of poverty. Efforts to support gender equality were therefore crucial to social, economic and political development.

One of the obstacles to effective action was the fragmented nature of United Nations poverty eradication activities, particularly at the country level. In fact, Governments sometimes had to deal with as many as 15 to 20 United Nations agencies, which often pulled in different directions and at times even competed for funds. Fundamental structural and organizational changes were therefore needed in order to pull the system together.

For its part, the Council must strengthen its own ability to provide overall policy guidance for development cooperation. While efforts to improve coordination at the field level were continuing, the resident coordinator system, the country strategy note and the programme approach all needed to be further enhanced. In that regard, the functional commissions had an important role to play in promoting coordination within the United Nations system. Some

of the commissions had presented multi-year programmes for their future work. It was the Council's responsibility, however, to ensure a clear division of labour among the commissions and to coordinate their multi-year programmes with a view to reducing overlapping and enhancing their effectiveness.

While the primary responsibility for poverty eradication activities lay with Governments, there was also a clear need for international support from both traditional and new sources. For its part, Sweden would continue to assume its share of the responsibility to provide development assistance. He welcomed the earlier reiteration by the European Union of its commitment to the target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product for official development assistance. It was necessary, however, for other Members of the United Nations to commit themselves to that target and to strive to fulfil it as early as possible.

Ms. SIBAL (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)) said that more than one billion people lived in inhuman conditions of poverty in both the developed and developing world. In keeping with its firm commitment to contribute to the achievement of the goals of the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty, UNESCO made available to member States its technical expertise in the formulation of strategies, policies and programmes for combating poverty and promoting sustainable human development. It would also play an active role in the campaign to develop greater awareness of the need to combat poverty and exclusion, by distributing documents and participating in debates, in cooperation with the media, non-governmental organizations, municipalities and secondary school pupils.

More generally, and in accordance with the recommendations contained in the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, UNESCO planned to draw upon the capacities and expertise of national universities to analyse and evaluate the state of knowledge about poverty in different countries, thereby facilitating the formulation of project proposals for submission to external funding sources.

UNESCO believed that poverty was a gross injustice and that the way to eradicate poverty was not through charity, but through empowerment of the poor. The Organization's mandate covered not only education but also natural and social sciences and culture, and its focus had been on disadvantaged groups, such as the least developed countries, indigenous populations, women, rural youth, the handicapped and the aged. It also contributed to capacity-building

and supported analyses of the root causes of poverty in specific cultural and social settings.

Its strategy for the eradication of poverty among rural women was based on the principle of strengthening the role of women in society. Given the increasing feminization of poverty, UNESCO hoped to encourage full utilization of national capacities in development planning with a view to making women working in the informal sector less vulnerable. In Africa, for example, a special project on women and water resources supply and use was being implemented.

UNESCO was very aware that while mankind had used its wealth and knowledge to explore space and reach the moon, it had failed to reach poor neighbourhoods and ghettos. It was that consciousness which shaped its operational activities.

Mr. HAMDAN (Lebanon) said that poverty was a major source of children's suffering, leading to increasing levels of violence, human rights violations, environmental degradation, overpopulation, and urban decay. Coordinated action on poverty required the creation of a global mechanism which would take account of the sectoral plans agreed upon at the recent major Conferences.

While the inter-agency task forces referred to in the report of the Secretary-General (E/1996/61) had an important role to play in poverty eradication, a global coordination mechanism was needed to help the international community develop a multilateral plan of action in support of national anti-poverty strategies.

Anti-poverty strategies should underscore the link that existed between action for poverty eradication and action for peace, and recognize the negative impact of poverty-led emigration on sending countries. Economic liberalization was vital in the long term for economic growth and development, but the poor needed cooperation between international organizations, Governments and non-governmental organizations to address the shortcomings of private sector-led development. Of equal importance was coordination with agencies concerned with transfer of technology and intellectual property.

The Lebanese authorities had already worked closely with United Nations agencies and international financial institutions on reconstruction programmes and strategies involving women in the fight against poverty. In the long term,

it was only by attacking the roots of poverty that such strategies could succeed.

Mr. DJABBARY (Observer for the Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the recent series of global conferences had clearly shown the need for international cooperation to tackle poverty. The international community should address the issue in a comprehensive and integrated fashion and in accordance with the needs and priorities of individual developing countries. Poverty should be addressed by investing in food production, health, education, human resources, productive employment and infrastructure and by promoting sustained economic growth. A more positive response from multilateral financial institutions to the challenges and opportunities for cooperation would necessitate a review of the functions and mandates of those institutions in relation to the United Nations system. However, cooperation between the United Nations system and the Bretton Woods institutions should not affect the universal, voluntary, neutral and multilateral nature of the financial resources of the United Nations in the field of development.

The Secretary-General's report failed to address the vital need for the creation of an enabling international environment conducive to the development activities of developing countries. However, his delegation fully agreed that poverty eradication strategies should be country-specific and that individual countries bore the primary responsibility for defining their own strategy in that regard. All poverty alleviation efforts should be in accordance with the priorities and development objectives of the Government involved. There was also an increasing need for a substantial increase in financial resources and harmonization of the efforts and activities of the United Nations system in the field of poverty eradication.

The intergovernmental task force mechanism should be used not only for coordinated assistance at the country level but also for coherent advice on economic and social activities consistent with the coordination mandate of the Economic and Social Council.

Establishing an enabling economic environment could not be considered in isolation from trade prospects, technology transfer, financial resources and other important issues. In addition, the activities of the various commissions and organizations in the field of poverty eradication should be carried out in a

coordinated manner in order to avoid duplication of effort and ensure equal treatment of all aspects of the problem.

Mr. GUBAREVICH (Belarus) said that the sheer scale of the task of poverty eradication made it necessary for the United Nations to take further systematic steps to enhance the effectiveness of the work of its institutional structures and harmonize their activities while avoiding duplication. His Government endorsed the pivotal role of the resident coordinator system at the field level and the subordination of poverty eradication programmes to national Governments. Cooperation in the field of economic and social development between the United Nations system and the Bretton Woods institutions was a key element in the fight against poverty. The programmes of the Council and its functional commissions should be strengthened through the mobilization of adequate funding which should be regular and predictable in nature. At the same time the Council should ensure greater coordination in the work of its functional commissions and eliminate areas of duplication. His delegation also endorsed the need for more effective incorporation of the gender perspective into United Nations activities for poverty eradication. The Council should be particularly supportive of the work of the Commission for Social Development, the Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission on Sustainable Development.

In implementing its economic and social policies designed to eradicate poverty, the United Nations should take greater account of the specific needs and problems of countries with transitional economies. For Belarus, which had embarked on a programme of radical economic and social reform and had been stricken by the Chernobyl disaster, poverty was a relatively new phenomenon. Such country-specific factors necessitated a fresh approach to the task of eradicating poverty.

Mr. KOBAYASHI (Japan) said that the Secretary-General's report provided a clear picture of how the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council and other intergovernmental bodies should harmonize and coordinate their activities in the field of poverty eradication. Eradicating poverty was an issue that cut across the themes of recent international conferences, and in pursuing that goal it was the task of the Council to provide clear policy guidance to its functional commissions and relevant intergovernmental bodies while at the same time establishing a framework for the

division of labour between them. Coordination and harmonization would be useful in reducing duplication of work in following up and implementing the outcome of international conferences.

Efforts to eradicate poverty must be comprehensive and promote not only economic growth but also development and social justice. Regarding coordination of United Nations support for and availability of resources to the United Nations system for facilitating national poverty eradication plans and programmes, his delegation agreed with the recommendations set out in the Secretary-General's report since they were consistent with the new development strategy which Japan had been advocating in various forums. However, full coordination among development assistance donors could not be achieved unless there was also coordination between the multilateral assistance organizations and bilateral donors which provided a substantial portion of development resources. Moreover, development cooperation was most effective when development assistance was combined with private-sector activities such as private investment and trade. The important role played by non-governmental organizations should also be considered. All of those elements, together with coordination between the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions, were essential ingredients of a comprehensive approach.

His delegation considered that the best way to make such ideas a reality was to formulate model programmes or projects in which all bodies involved in development activities would be invited to participate.

Regarding the increasing feminization of poverty and efforts by the United Nations system to incorporate a gender perspective into poverty eradication programmes, his Government believed that specific measures should be taken to target women as the beneficiaries of development assistance. The participation of women in the formulation and implementation of all policies and programmes aimed at poverty eradication should also be promoted. The Economic and Social Council, in cooperation with the Commission on the Status of Women, should develop a system for monitoring and evaluating gender sensitivity as a matter of urgency.

In order to find ways of monitoring the performance of the United Nations in the field of poverty reduction, it was incumbent upon the Council to ensure the harmonization and coordination of all the agendas and work programmes of the functional commissions by introducing an integrated approach to the

intergovernmental consideration of poverty eradication. Each of the functional commissions should focus on poverty in relation to its core issue so that the issue of poverty could be addressed from various perspectives. The results of such an approach should be shared among the various commissions.

Mr. POWELL (World Food Programme) said that hunger was not just a symptom of poverty but also a cause thereof, since a person who was hungry could not produce and compete with one who was well-nourished. Acknowledging two basic facts - that hunger caused poverty and most of the hungry were women - had been the starting point in rethinking how the World Food Programme (WFP) targeted its food aid.

WFP needed to channel more of its aid through women and to give them control over managing and allocating those resources. Successful development projects directly related to women benefited communities as a whole. In emergencies such as Rwanda or Bosnia, the easy way out was to use the existing community power structure which tended to be male-dominated. WFP rejected that method since experience had shown that the task of getting food directly into the hands of needy families was more effectively accomplished by targeting women. It was pressing its field staff and its United Nations and non-governmental organization partners to follow new guidelines on involving women in assessing food aid needs, distributing food to households, and managing and monitoring overall distribution. WFP wanted to see women engaged at the outset in emergency operations and food aid projects for development. Just as important, women were key elements in healing the wounds of intra-State conflict, since peace required a focus on family, health and nutrition. In addition, WFP was involved in programmes to advance female education and literacy.

WFP participated fully in the current array of coordination machinery and supported nationally executed development projects. However, there were still areas where cooperation and coordination could be improved. Generally speaking, there was an inherent conflict between "safe" projects involving minimal risk and high rates of financial and economic return and working with abjectly poor people in remote and disadvantaged areas. It was therefore a challenge to coordinate the efforts of various partners such as government, non-government, bilateral donors, the United Nations system and the Bretton Woods institutions.

Mr. CHUN (Observer for the Republic of Korea) said that the promising economic climate for developing countries at the start of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty offered those countries a real opportunity to achieve progress in poverty eradication with the help of the international community. In that context, the United Nations should continue to work with Governments on the formulation of country strategy notes and policy framework papers and should invigorate the role of the resident coordinator. While supporting the creation of new mechanisms for a more coherent response to recipient countries' needs as proposed in section I of the Secretary-General's report (E/1996/61), he said that the organizational work for those mechanisms should not, however, divert resources away from poverty eradication activities.

At the intergovernmental level, the Council should act as the primary forum for discussion of poverty eradication, playing a central role in harmonizing the work of the functional commissions to avoid duplication of effort and ensure an integrated approach. In that regard, the functional commissions should focus on the core issues of their particular competence, participating in meetings on specific issues as part of the coordinated follow-up to conferences.

By seeking to promote a clear division of labour, while recognizing the contribution of diverse approaches to poverty eradication, the United Nations system could make a meaningful contribution to the challenge of poverty eradication for the coming decade.

Mr. GALVEZ (Chile) said that the issue of poverty eradication stood at the top of national and international agendas, and was a yardstick by which to gauge the revitalization of the United Nations system. The Council, therefore, had a particular responsibility for promoting coordination of activities for that end, particularly at the national level.

By strengthening support for national poverty eradication strategies through the resident coordinator system and enhancing cooperation with institutions at all levels, the United Nations had demonstrated its commitment to concrete and practical action on issues raised at the recent major conferences. Yet, little could be done unless resources were adequate to the task. For that reason, the Council should make a clear plea for more resources from the donor community.

The international community should make a particular effort to support the least developed countries in Africa through the Special Initiative on Africa; it

was equally important that the gender perspective should be included in all future development initiatives and poverty eradication programmes.

Given the recent reforms of the Commission for Social Development, and the importance of its work on poverty eradication he called for a greater degree of high-level participation in its sessions.

The functional Commissions should focus on the core issues of their particular competence when addressing the issue of poverty. At the same time, given the increasing feminization of poverty it was important to support the efforts of the Commission on the Status of Women to mainstream gender into the work of other commissions. The Statistical Commission also had important work to do in that area.

In coordinating activities to achieve the eradication of poverty, the underlying purpose should be the realization of development which worked to the direct benefit of people in need.

The meeting rose at 12.15 p.m.